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Year of the Donkey

Are the Democrats rising, or just listing to the left?

By Pete Du Pont

We do not know who will be the next president, but for now we know the worm has turned: The Democratic Party is gaining and the Republican Party is losing control of the government.

In the Bush years, the Republican Congress has spent like liberals. Federal spending is now \$23,000 per household, a \$7,000 increase in the past five years. There has been an annual 7.7% increase in nondefense discretionary spending, and the number of earmarks is up 57%.

In the past two years there have been four Republican congressional scandals (DeLay, Cunningham, Ney and Foley), and only one Democratic one (William Jefferson). So by last fall the national approval rating of the Republican Congress had fallen to 30%, resulting in a loss of six Senate and 27 House seats on Election Day, costing Republicans control of both Houses of Congress.

President Bush isn't doing much better. His approval rating has hovered in the low 30s since the beginning of the year. Four years of strong economic growth and two good Supreme Court appointments have helped him, but they weren't enough to make up for the four-year Iraq war, the failure of Social Security reform, and the increase in federal spending by 49% since he took office. Now come the political problems of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center matter, the U.S. attorney firings, and Scooter Libby's conviction.

So for the moment the Democrats have a significant political advantage. Last week's Pew Research Center poll showed that 50% of the public identifies or leans Democratic, and only 35% Republican. In 2002 the parties were tied at 43%.

The current GOP vision seems unclear. Republicans are unsure

of where they are going and what they wish to accomplish, so their 2008 presidential candidate is likely to set the course for the party. On the other hand, the Democratic Party's vision is firmly established: 1960s liberalism redux in the form of higher taxes, bigger government, greater regulation and immediate withdrawal of our troops from a military effort abroad.

Several issues illustrate the difference between the 1960s superliberals and their semiconservative Republican opponents:

- **The war against terrorism.** The 2008 election will be the first since 1972 that the central issue of the campaign will be America's participation in a war on foreign soil.

America's current focus is in Iraq, but its challenge is global—in Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan and Iran, among others. A recent CNN poll showed that 21% of Americans want to

withdraw from Iraq now, 37% within a year; and 39% want to remain as long as necessary.

All three Republicans believe the war in Iraq is important to defending America against Islamic terrorism around the globe. John McCain has a military background and makes the strongest arguments for fighting the war; Rudolph Giuliani was in charge of New York's dealing with the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center so he understands the challenge. Mitt Romney says success in Iraq "is in America's national security interest."

The three Democratic candidates are modern McGovernites. In 1972 Democratic nominee George McGovern was for complete withdrawal of all troops from Vietnam; today John Edwards and Sen. Barack Obama are for pulling our troops out of Iraq before Election Day, regardless of the consequences. Hillary Clinton's support of the war is fading. She initially refused to repudiate her pro-war vote, but later said that the number of American troops there should be capped--thus no current surge should be allowed--and now says that president Bush must "extricate our country" from Iraq before his presidency ends.

• **Economic growth.** The good news is the current strength of

the U.S. economy. For the past four years--2003 through 2006--annual growth has averaged a strong 6%, with inflation at less than 2.9%, and seven million new jobs have been created. The Bush tax cuts are a principal reason for all this opportunity, and their future existence after their expiration in 2010 is the most important economic question for the 2008 election.

As mayor of New York, Mr. Giuliani cut some two dozen tax rates. He believes the Bush tax cuts should be made permanent instead of expiring in 2010. Mr. Romney agrees with that, and as governor he solved his state's financial problems by spending controls rather than tax increases. Mr. McCain is far less reliable; he opposed the 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts and was against the repeal of the death tax. He did vote for the extension of the Bush tax cuts on dividends and capital gains, and now says he too wants to make them permanent.

On the Democratic side of the aisle, Mr. Edwards would eliminate all of the Bush tax cuts and raise taxes on oil companies. Mr. Obama voted against the 2006 dividend and capital gains tax cut extensions and against repealing the death tax. Mrs. Clinton supports higher taxes on oil companies and voted against the tax cuts too. It seems clear that if a

Democrat becomes president, taxes will rise substantially.

As for government spending, control of it was once a Republican policy, but it no longer is. Both parties want to spend more, and after the next election they will, the Democrats probably slightly more than the Republicans.

• **Free trade.** The North American Free Trade Agreement shows how trade matters to our economy. It greatly expanded our trade with Mexico and Canada, more than doubling our exports and creating more than one million new American jobs.

But the Democratic Party is protectionist. Just a week after the last election, a majority of House Democrats voted against a Vietnam trade agreement. The new House has 16 more antitrade Democratic members than it used to, and five of the six new Democratic Senators are protectionists. Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Obama voted against the Central American Free Trade Agreement. Mr. Edwards says, "Congress should make it clear to the president that it will override any agreement that does not protect American jobs and American interests."

On the Republican side Mr. McCain has voted for all the recent free trade agreements, and Mr. Romney says protectionism would make

America "a second-tier economy" with a "second-class standard of living."

• **Energy.** President Bush wants to end America's addiction to and dependence on foreign oil, a good idea that can be accomplished in many ways: build more nuclear power plants; begin drilling offshore on the Outer Continental Shelf and Alaska, where there is enough oil to replace all foreign oil imports for 25 years and enough natural gas to supply America's needs for 19 years.

But Democrats are opposed to all of these opportunities; 155 of 195 House Democrats voted last June to block OCS drilling. Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Obama are against any Alaskan ANWR drilling, and she is opposed to the construction of new nuclear power plants and any offshore drilling. Mr. Obama opposes lifting the 54-cent-a-gallon tariff on imported ethanol from Brazil--which would reduce our dependency of foreign oil--and is opposed to Gulf of Mexico oil drilling because it focuses on increasing supply rather than reducing demand. Mr. Edwards does not want to do anything that would "weaken the OCS moratorium on new drilling off our coasts."

On the Republican side, Mr. McCain voted against ANWR, but he and Mr. Romney support offshore drilling and all three

candidates are for building more nuclear power plants.

• **Global warming.** Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth" has moved global warming to the top of the political agenda, and all the candidates with the exception of Mr. Romney seem to have signed on to federal regulation of factory emissions. Mrs. Clinton is a global warming regulation advocate, and although the global climate warmed just one degree in the last century, Mr. Edwards says that "global warming is an emergency" and "a crisis today" that will no doubt require new taxes to do something about it.

Mr. McCain and Mr. Obama have sponsored a bill that would over time reduce emissions to one-third of 2000 levels, which unless other nations do the same would have a devastating impact on America's jobs and economy. Mr. Giuliani believes that the debate on global warming is "almost unnecessary" since "the overwhelming number of scientists" believe there is a significant human cause."

Only Mr. Romney sees the challenge: "Kyoto-style sweeping mandates, imposed unilaterally in the United States, would kill jobs, depress growth and shift manufacturing to the dirtiest developing nations." And "Republicans should never abandon pro-growth conservative principles

in an effort to embrace the ideas of Al Gore. Instead of sweeping mandates, we must use America's power of innovation to develop alternative sources of energy and new technologies that use energy more efficiently."

There are many more clues to the Democratic Party's revitalized '60s liberalism. Mrs. Clinton has told us that "we are going to take things away from you on behalf of the common good," which means bigger government and fewer individual choices. She has also pledged to do in her administration what she tried to do in her husband's: "When I am president, we will have universal health care coverage in our country."

The Democratic Party does have some advantage at the moment, but if their modern McGovernism extends beyond the war to the '60s liberalism of higher taxes and bigger government and greater regulation, the president taking office in January of 2009 may just turn out to be a Republican.

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